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WOODROW WILSON

INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS

JAMES H. BILLINGTON, DIRECTOR

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION BUILDING WASHINGTON D.C. 20560

TELEPHONE 202/381 5613 CABLE WILCEN

April 4, 1974

Professor Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
Stanford University School of Medicine
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Professor Lederberg:

I am writing to inquire if there is any possibility that we might at the very least, have a visit with you for a special lunch or dinner or at the most, hopefully interest you in the possibility of a fellowship at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. This is, as you may know, a new institute for advanced study, located in the old castle building of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. It is the nation's official memorial to Woodrow Wilson and as far as we know, the only completely living memorial to a former head of state anywhere in the world. We are in the process of building, I think, an extraordinarily interesting and diverse group of scholars, all of whom are doing their own advanced research yet welcome the chance to interact with an international group within the Center and to some extent at lunches and dinners with the public sector here in Washington.

I have attached the highest priority to introducing into this group (whose most recent fellows include the Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, Mr. Elliot Richardson and Mr. George Kennan) a natural scientist of the highest distinction, who at the same time reaches out of his discipline into some of the broader questions and concerns of our civilization. It seemed to me that such a person should be in the life sciences in our time and that we could do no better than to start with you. It would be gratifying to at least have your counsel and hopefully to have your presence under one of several possible formats. We can offer fairly generous and flexible terms of residence here, and I would love to discuss the whole matter with you in detail. I know, however, how busy you are and I have no way of knowing whether the Washington area and this institution in particular might interest you at all. While we cannot offer the large in-house laboratory and other facilities that would be normal in your profession, we do offer proximity to some (and I am sympathetic with building up a natural science group within the Center so we could offer the prospect of colleagues). The crucial

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thing is beginning in this area -- as I hope we are in others -- at the very highest level of distinction and the deepest level of broader concerns. Is there any chance we might think about starting with you?

I should say that I know about you from many of your Stanford colleagues, so that this letter is very much addressed to you personally even though I have never met you, and not simply to your reputation. Your interest in the Center at Stanford and your recent article in the Symposium on Human Nature persuade me that yours could be an input in our operation here that could have important side effects for our civilization. In preparing to take this job, I read the Commissioned semi-secret history of the Institute for Advanced Study, by Oppenheimer, with whom I was privileged to have at least some acquaintance with during my years as professor at Princeton. They decided to launch the Institute building around math and physics. I would hope to build around the twin poles of the life sciences and deep humanistic history.

I would love to talk about it some more, but do not wish to impose on you if any consideration or contact is out of the question for the foreseeable future.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,


James H. Billington

JHB/map